

When it comes to the Gospel, how does one pick a winner? That's a strange question (I know) but stick with me for a moment...

There have been people who I've met, and as I've gotten to know them, I've discovered they're:

- really nice people;
- high moral standards;
- trustworthy;
- dependable;
- truthful...

and it's like "You're a better Christian than a lot of Christians I know – you just don't believe..." (which is pretty big deficit, really).

And these are the sorts of people that we will often be more inclined to invite to a church function, in the hope that they might hear the gospel and be saved... They deserve to be saved – they're so nice...

And some of these, **will** respond to the Gospel. But many don't. As nice as they are, many hearts are hardened and they're not born again.

And then we might see so-&-so, and they're really needy. They're:

- broke;
- marriage has failed;
- kids are uncontrollable;
- drunks;
- maybe other substance abuse issues;
- depressed; and

- world is falling apart

And we recognise “You need Jesus.” They are so broken, and they’ve got nothing to live for – they’ve gotta be ripe for the Gospel...

And once again, the same thing. We invite **them** to a church function, in the hope that they will hear the gospel and be saved. And some **will** respond to the Gospel, but many don’t. As desperate as they are, many hearts remain hardened...

When it comes to the Gospel, how does one pick a winner? We don’t. At least I can’t do it.

I always remember the Parable of the Sower. The word of God is broadcast/spread out into the world, and it lands where it lands – on all types.

Some will:

- never germinate;
- germinate die out;
- start growing and be choked; But

- land on good soil, and it grows and yields a crop...

When it comes to the Gospel, where is the good soil? And that’s the thing: Some of it will be:

- the nice people;
- the needy people;
- cantankerous ones;
- the ones that nobody likes;
- rich;
- poor;
- young;

- old;
- famous;
- nobodies...

Do you see where I'm going with this? As Disciples of Jesus, our calling is to proclaim the Good News of Jesus to who? To **all**.

How do we do that?

- We let somebody else do it, right??? I don't think so
- We let the more mature Christians do it, right???...

- Perhaps a stadium full of people and a speaker after the vein of Billy Graham, that's how it happens, right???

Sometimes. And we praise God for those whom He has gifted as evangelists to preach in stadiums filled with thousands...

But how do those thousands arrive there in the first place?
Personal invitation.

You see, the Gospel is very personal. And we see that in today's reading.

Jesus goes out and sees a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth.

Who here enjoys paying tax? *Somebody said to me once "I do, because it means I've made money."* Sadly, because of the way our system works, some of the wealthiest people are

able to structure their affairs so they pay relatively little tax (but I digress).

Generally, not many of us like having to pay tax. But in first century Israel, they **hated** it. And they hated the tax **collectors** even more. Do you know why? They worked for the enemy.

You see, Israel was an occupied land. The Romans had come in, given them a jolly good flogging, and now they were subjected to Rome. And part of belonging to the Roman Empire meant they had to pay taxes to Rome for the privilege of having them rule them. Guess what those taxes were used for – All sorts of things, including paying the legions of soldiers garrisoned in their midst to keep the locals under control. Nobody liked that.

And the Romans used locals to gather the tax for them. Can you imagine how unpopular that would be – collecting tax for the enemy... And that's why it paid so well. It was quite a lucrative job to extract taxes out of your countrymen to fund the Roman Empire...

And to understand just how much a tax collector was looked down upon, all we have to do is see how they are described by others: Tax Collectors & Sinners; Tax Collectors & Prostitutes... They were seen as such despicable people, they weren't just "sinners" – they had their own **category** of sin.

And Jesus says to Levi (the tax collector), **"Follow me."** Jesus called this despicable person. ²⁸ **And leaving everything, he rose and followed him.**

That's pretty much the same as what we saw the fishermen did: Peter, Andrew, James and John, left everything to follow Jesus. And so did Levi.

BTW, there's a bit of a debate as to who Levi is. It was quite common for someone to go by a couple of different names, so this could be another name for Matthew who was called in exactly the same way, and went on to become one of the 12 Apostles. Or, he could be a different bloke with a very similar story. Anyway, it doesn't matter – we'll just call him Levi.

Luke is telling us that Levi made a decisive break with his old life, to become a Disciple of Jesus.

And the next thing Levi does, is he puts on a feast **for** Jesus. I've always had in my head, that he puts on a party for his friends, to introduce them to Jesus. But it's the other way around. He puts on a party for Jesus, and he invites his friends to Jesus' party. An important difference: Jesus becomes the centrepiece of Levi's life, and he wants all of his friends to know about it.

This is a celebration of **Jesus**. And Levi invites others to the celebration.

And we're told there were a lot of **tax collectors** and **others** at the party. – what sorts of people were these? Well, the Pharisees describe them as **tax collectors and sinners**.

You see, the tax collectors, it's not that they didn't have **any** friends. They just didn't have 'nice'/godly/acceptable friends.

All the most despised members of society found companionship in the company of each other.

Meanwhile, the Pharisees were the opposite of that (“The Separated Ones”). They were so concerned for their **own** holiness, that they would separate themselves from anyone who they viewed as being unclean – They didn’t want unholiness rubbing off onto them.

And the tax collectors and their mates, represented the very worst of everything the Pharisees were trying to avoid. And so the Pharisees were aghast that Jesus (this so-called holy man) would mix with them. And not just mix with these sinners – He would **eat** with them... Ooww...

You see, to eat with someone – that’s what you do with your friends / people you love / people whom you are willing to welcome....

And the Pharisees grumbled at Jesus' disciples. “Why do you do that???” “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”

And while they grumbled at the disciples, it was **Jesus** who gave the answer, and it was quite simple. “**Those who are well** don’t need **a physician**, It’s those who are sick who need a physician. ³² **I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.**”

Wise words. “It’s the **sick** who need a doctor”. Jesus knew they were sinners. And a key message that comes through in the Gospel of Luke, is “repentance” – the message to turn away from sin and to follow Jesus.

BTW, as we get further into the Gospel of Luke, we’re going to discover that some of the greatest sinners, were the Pharisees. Why? Because Jesus see beyond external appearances of holiness, and He sees what’s in the heart.

Anyway, Levi, was a brand new follower of Jesus. Jesus had become the centrepiece of His life. And so he invited all of his old friends/acquaintances, to a party for Jesus...

That is what effective evangelism looks like. Inviting those you know, from every walk of life, to a party for Jesus.

Some Christians find this to be one of the hardest things to do. But the world is filled with the sick, who need a doctor.

So, if we unpack this metaphor:

- The sickness is sin – rebellion against God (rejection of God).
- The symptoms are evil, hatred, bitterness, selfishness, godlessness, pride, sexual immorality, gossip, slander.
- The cure is the Gospel – the message, to come to Jesus. Repent and believe. And the cure is 100% successful.

All who repent of sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are saved...

But that leaves us with a question: In this metaphor, who is the doctor?

I'll tell you a simple answer:

The doctor is the one who:

- goes to sinners;
- **eats** with sinners;
- rubs shoulders with sinners;
- who loves sinners; and

loves them so much he/she calls sinners to repentance.

Who's the physicians? **We** are! Or at least we're supposed to be. **We** are the ones who have been entrusted with the Good News of Jesus, (to share). But are we sharing it? The world is filled with the sick who need a doctor. And that's exactly what you and I are called to be.

Now, some Christians really enjoy hanging out with sinners. They love being with sinners more than they love being with Christians. Do you know why? Because they like to do, what the unsaved do. When they're with their non-Christian mates, they get drunk; they swear; they tell filthy jokes... And I've heard some Christians claim, "This is how God wants me to be". By having a few drinks with the boys & talking like they do – it helps me to fit in better and they accept me...

Don't you dare ever tell me, that it's the will of God for us to continue in sin for His glory.... What a lie of the Devil that is.

1 John 1: (ESV) ⁵ ... God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

We need to be aware that sin, is an **infectious** disease.

Have you noticed that when a doctor is treating an infectious disease, they wear full PPE. The doctor has to guard that they do not contract the same sickness the patient has.

And so:

- A Pharisee guards himself against infection by separating himself off.

He has no concern for anyone but himself.

- An negligent physician, is someone who wants to come across as being relevant; non-judging; open; and just like the patient...

And so he mixes with sinners **and** embraces the ways of sinners.

But,

- A **true** Physician guards himself against infection, and confidently champions the cure;

Are you following me?

What are you and I?

Some of us might more like the Pharisees. We don't mix with sinners because we don't like it; Or maybe it's **not** an

aversion – we just don't have any friends who are sinners.
(All of our friends are Christians).

Some of us might see ourselves as a physician, but we ourselves are negligent in our faith, and infected with the disease. Yes, we eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners,,, but instead of us calling them to repentance, we get caught up in their drunkenness and sinful ways.

The call of Jesus, is for His disciples (you and I) to be physicians. We throw a party for Jesus by inviting folk to our homes, and we eat with them, with the intent of calling them to repentance.

Are we willing to do that? To invite those we wouldn't normally mix with, to our homes, and share dinner with them... Some of you probably freak out at that. (Quick. Hide the valuables)...

But I suspect more of us are freaked out with the next bit – calling sinners to repentance. Many of us feel totally inadequate to do that.

What if we do what Levi did? He threw a party for Jesus and invited all his non-Christian mates, and he let somebody else do the message. (He was lucky – he had Jesus to do it). But you know what – there are Christians in this church who are quite capable of sharing their faith. We mightn't be polished. But people aren't looking for polished – they're looking for what's authentic.

Why don't you put on a dinner for Jesus; invite some non-Christian friends; and invite a Christian friend and ask him or her to be prepared to share their faith.

In essence, that's what programs like Alpha or Exploring Christianity do. – you invite people to a meal (and it's best to have it at your home), and for a few weeks, you explore together what Christianity is about...

What if we did something like that? I'd be in that. We could organise a night of the week where you could invite a few friends over for a meal, and we could do Christianity Explored together (Total 10 weeks). Think about it.

So Jesus didn't cut Himself off from sinners. ... How could He call sinners to repentance, if He wasn't in their midst?

But the Pharisees are still having a dig at Him, and so they change tack: To them it appeared that Jesus and His disciples were way too **cheerful** for good religious folk.

They said, "The disciples of John the Baptist fast often and pray, and so do our disciples. Why do yours eat and drink???" Alright, basically they're saying, "Why are they not denying themselves, and instead they're having a good time?"

And Jesus said, "You can't expect the wedding guests to fast while the bride groom's with them". ³⁵ **The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days."**

To follow Jesus, is to enter a happy experience. Why do some Christians come across as being such sad sorts of people??? Being a disciple of Jesus is a really happy experience. Yes, there are times to fast as we pray. But when Christians fast, nobody should even know about it. The Pharisees had a habit of putting on a show, “I’m fasting you know, ohh.”

As Christians, we experience genuine joy in fellowship and communion with one another.

Now, having said that, some Christians fake their enthusiasm – fake their joy... I went to a worship leader’s training thing once and the well-known Christian who was running it said, “When you’re leading worship, ‘faith it until you make it’. Not ‘fake it until you make it’” he said, “Faith it until you make it”...

But “faking it” is exactly what he wanted us to do. He said, “If you’re going to be leading worship, you have to be really joyful. And if you’re having a really bad day, and you’re a bit sad, pretend that you’re happy, and in faith, you will get happy....”

The joy of the Lord isn’t something to be faked. Be genuine with God. Be genuine with each other. If you’re sad, share your sadness, that we can pray for one another. So, we don’t fake joy. As Christians, we experience genuine joy in fellowship and communion with one another.

You see, there was a disconnect between what the Pharisees saw as holiness, and what Jesus was demonstrating. And Jesus gives 2 parables, to explain the disconnect.

No one tears a piece off of a new shirt, to patch an old one. (absurd). It ruins the new garment, and it doesn't match the old one.

When Jesus came, He did not come to patch up the old religious system of Judaism. The purpose of Judaism – the purpose of the Old Covenant, was to prepare the way for Jesus. That was its intent (right from the beginning).

It is impossible to graft Christianity onto any other religion. Or even onto any other life for that matter.

Becoming a Christian, isn't about adding a bit of Jesus to your life. Becoming a Christian is about putting to death the old man, and raising up the new. If we try to just add a bit of Jesus to our existing life, we destroy what Christianity is, and it doesn't match our old life.

And the second parable, You don't put **new wine into old wineskins**. If you do, **the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed**.

A wineskin isn't something that makes wine sound delicious to me.

A wineskin was made from the skin of either a young sheep or a young goat, so it essentially became a leather(ish) container. Just imagine you got a skin and you scraped out all of the guts and meat and bones, and then cured the skin and tied off the

legs and you tie off any other holes (orifices) in the skin. And attach a spout onto the neck, then you've got a wineskin.

A fresh wineskin had 'give' in it. And so when the new wine fermented, it would expand, and the fresh wineskin would expand with it. If you put fresh wine into an old skin, when it started to ferment, it would burst. You'd lose the wine. You'd lose the skin.

What the Old Covenant had become, could not contain the new thing that Jesus was doing. If we try to restrict Christianity to all of the rules and the regulations that the Pharisees had, it would burst. What Jesus was doing, was bigger than this. The Pharisees wouldn't even eat in the company of sinners/godless. But Jesus came to bring Jew and Gentile together. Those who were unworthy, would be made holy through the blood of Jesus.

Jesus didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

But the Pharisees would never accept that, and Jesus knew that, too. He says, "Those who are used to drinking the old wine, don't want to even taste the new." "Happy with the old wine, thanks."

The Pharisees were content with the old system, the way it was. They didn't even want to give Jesus a try.

That, is the way of unbelief. If a person is content with who they are and with what their life is, they're unlikely to even give Jesus a try.

I'm reminded of the Psalm that says:

**Psalm 34: (ESV) 8 Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!**

And that's all the message we need, to share Jesus with those who are sick.

**Psalm 34: (ESV) 8 Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!
(Give Him a go).**

Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus Christ,
We have tasted.
And we know You are indeed Good.

Lord, fill us with joy.
May we be known as a people who delight in You;
who delight in the company of one another;
and who put on a party for You.

Lord, give us a love for the lost,
that we would mix with those who are not like us,
and call sinners to repentance.

Lord, we thank You,

that somebody did that for us.

We were sinners – sinners who were called to repentance.

May we now be physicians, preaching the cure to those who are sick.

And may You do what only You can do:
Softening hearts, so that many would respond to Your word.

in Jesus' Name,
Amen.